

What is Olive Oil?

Olive oil is made from olives, the fruit of the olive tree. It also has the good cholesterol (unsaturated fat), HDL, which may lower bad cholesterol (saturated fat). Here is my little health tidbit: LDLs carry a lot of cholesterol, leave behind fatty deposits on your artery walls, and contribute to heart disease. HDLs do the opposite. They clean the artery walls and remove extra cholesterol from the body, thus lowering the risk of heart disease. LDL is sometimes called bad cholesterol and HDL good cholesterol. It is desirable to have low levels of LDL and high levels of HDL. (Smoking lowers HDL levels.) The benefits from olive oil consumption for the human organism are many:

- Reduces the level of LDL cholesterol
- Reduces the blockage of arteries
- Reduces the blood pressure of arteries
- Reduces the level of blood sugar
- Increases the secretion of bile
- Increases the absorption of Vitamins A, D and E
- Facilitates the absorption of other vitamins
- Prevents arteriosclerosis
- Prevents myocardium heart attack

OLIVE OIL - the strength of its flavor lends itself to use as a salad dressing (add a little lemon juice or vinegar for extra "tang") or as a condiment with pastas, pizzas and hot vegetables. Prized throughout the world both for cooking (particularly in Mediterranean countries) and for salads. It can also be used in casseroles and in sauces. Olive oil is comparatively pricey, but this is not surprising when you consider that on average a tree produces 10 kilos of fruit and it takes 5 kilos of fruit to make 1 kilo of oil.

Here are the steps to olive oil making:

Cleaning the olives, grind the olives to a paste, separate the oils from the fruit water (pomace), pressing the oil for further extractions, and finally, bottling and storing the olive oil.

The origins of the olive coincide with those of Mediterranean civilization: the first olive groves were cultivated in Syria and Palestine, and around 1000 B.C. spread throughout Italy. In order to develop, the olive tree needs water, sun, and soil that is not too deep. Olive oil is the only fundamental food, which derives from a fruit and after 50 centuries is still obtained by the same process of pressing the ground olives and then separating the oil from the vegetation water. For

olive oil to earn the name "virgin", it must be obtained from the olive by mechanical processes only, and in conditions of which temperature is the most important, where the oil is not altered. The oil must not undergo procedures other than those of washing, decanting, centrifugal treatment and filtration.

The flavor, color and fragrance of olive oils can vary dramatically depending on distinctions such as growing region and the crop's condition. All olive oils are graded in accordance with the degree of acidity they contain.

Different grades of Olive Oil:

Extra virgin olive oil, the cold-pressed result of the first pressing of the olives, is only 1 percent acid. It's considered the finest and fruitiest of the olive oils and is therefore also the most expensive. Extra virgin olive oil can range from a crystalline champagne color to greenish-golden to bright green. In general, the deeper the color, the more intense the "olive" flavor. Extra Virgin olive oil accounts for less than 10% of oil in many producing countries. Used on salads, added at the table to soups and stews and for dipping.

Virgin olive oil has a perfect flavor and odor. A first-pressed oil with a slightly higher level of acidity (between 1 and 3 %).

Ordinary Virgin olive oil (once called *pure olive oil*) contains a combination of refined olive oil and virgin or extra virgin oil and has good flavor and odor. The acidity level is usually 3%. Ordinary oil may still be fine for frying or where flavor is not wanted or needed.

Light olive oil - In the U.S., flavorless and often low quality oil is sold as "lite" or "light" oil for a premium price. The "light" designation refers to flavor, not caloric content, as all has the same amount of calories. There is no official definition of lite or light. What the term "light" refers to is that--because of an extremely fine filtration process--this olive oil is lighter in both color and fragrance, and has little of the classic olive-oil flavor. It's this rather nondescript flavor that makes "light" olive oil perfect for baking and cooking where regular olive oil's obvious essence might be undesirable. The filtration process for this light-style oil also gives it a higher smoke point than regular olive oil. Light olive oils can therefore be used for high-heat frying, whereas regular olive oil is better suited for low- to medium-heat cooking, as well as for many

uncooked foods such as salad dressings and marinades.

What is Cold Pressed?

The best olive oil, a chemical-free process that involves only pressure, which produces a natural level of low acidity. Cold pressed olive oil is made by milling the olives into paste under cold conditions then malaxation or mixing of the paste for 30 to 60 minutes with the addition of heat via steam or hot water jackets to raise it up to body temperature. It is important not to over heat the oil beyond the point that would degrade the flavor of the oil, where it would not qualify as extra virgin.

The International Olive Oil Institute recommends using pure olive oil for frying, since the flavor of extra virgin olive oil tends to break down at frying temperatures, making the added expense a waste. Olive oil should be stored in a cool, dark place for up to 6 months. It can be refrigerated, in which case it will last up to a year. Chilled olive oil becomes cloudy and too thick to pour. However, it will clear and become liquid again when brought to room temperature.

If you are interested in learning more about olive oil making, come join Marisa DiNitto, our ICR Specialist, on March 13. She is having an Olive Oil Workshop Factory Visit to learn the unique process of "cold pressing." This workshop is only offered once a year, so do it while you can. You will also be able to purchase olive oil; so don't forget your bottles. For more information, call the Fleet & Family Support Center at 0771-709-818 or stop by our office on the second floor.



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